

...ed or painfully the spirit of its divine Author.
They were first published in 1645, but for
nearly a century obtained but little notice from
the lovers of polite literature, the Addison and
Popes of the day. They are thought, by Dr. Warton, to
have been originally indebted to Handel's music for
the notice they at last obtained.

Little is not an effort of Genius, but rather
an outpouring of poetic feeling. We have here
a succession of pleasing and striking images, which
are dwelt upon just as they are
at 1.

never been heard of since the days of noon.

The metre of these verses is admirably adapted to the subject. The reader can hardly believe that he is not one of the party, tripping it over hill and dale "on the light fantastic toe."

A verse of poetry should strike the reader, as it did the poet, as a whole, not so much as the sign of an idea as that idea itself.

— As Imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the Poets pen
is to shape —

which they are already

in every respect, so as to satisfy its aerial occupant, it is enough, whatever may be the order of architecture. Thus was it with our architect.

But the parts and members of his verses are equally appropriate and striking. With the idea comes the very word, if its sense is not wanted, its sound is.

But lo! the sun is up, the hounds are out, the ploughman has already driven his team afield, and as he gaily treads the fragrant furrow, his merry whistle "is heard the fields around," responsive to the milkmaid's song, who now repairs with pail on head, and quick elastic step, to her humble stool. The mower, too, has commenced his labors in the meadow at hand,

And every shepherd tells his tale
Under the hawthorne in the dale.

Such a picture of rural felicity as is presented in these and the following lines, is rarely to be met with even in poetry. Fancy has her hands full, as thousand images are flitting before her, bringing with them a crowd of delightful associations, and she is forced, in spite of

6 herself, to join the reel and thread the ma
of the dance. And then for

the spicy nut-brown ale,
With stories told of many a feat—
these are the "delights," the recreations and jolly
pastimes that will fetch the day about from sun
to sun, and rock the tedious ^{year} as in a delight-
ful dream." The poet leaves not a single chord
untouched if the reader will but yield himself
up to his influence. This whole poem is to be
regarded rather as a "sweet digression" than
an elaborate effort, as an effusion rather than
a production.

Johnson has well observed, in his biographical
notice of Milton, "No mirth can indeed be
found in his melancholy; but I am afraid
that I always meet some melancholy in his
mirth." His mirth wears a pensive hue,
his melancholy is but a pleasing contemplative
mood. The transition from *Little Ghetto* to *Il
Penseroso* is by no means abrupt, the vain
deluding joys which are referred to in the com-
mencement of the latter, are not those

unreproved pleasures which the poet has just recounted,
for they are by no means inconsistent with that soft mel-
ancholy which he paints, but rather, the fickle pen-
sioners of that Euphrosyne whose sister graces are
Merrit and Drift, a very different crew from that
which waits upon the "daughters fair" of Tophyr and
Stunora. The latter are content with daylight and
a moderate portion of the night—when tales are
done—to bed they creep,
By which

The precise date of these poems is not known, they were
probably, however, together with his *Cornus* and *By-
cidas*, the fruit of those five years of literary leisure,
from 1632 to 1637, which our author is known to
have spent at Horton, in Buckinghamshire. Surely

perhaps, the finest in the whole poem

A sable stole thrown over her decent shoulders,
with slow and measured steps, and looks that hold
"sweet converse" with the skies, reflecting a portion
of their own placidness, she gradually draws near.
But lo! the "cherub contemplation" delays her linger-
ing steps, her eyes upraised to heaven, the earth
is for a space forgot - time lingers in his course,
but a moment - hark! - he's sent - future -

olleg
bright spot in the student's history, and
by day, a pillar of fire by night, shedding a grate-
ful lustre over long years of toil, and cheering
him onward to the end of his pilgrimage. Im-
mured within the dark but classic walls of
a Stoughton or Holis his weary and

^{Thompson} attributes its sighing to the "Sad Genies of the coming storm," "Gray too, seems to have been equally affected by it. Did you never observe" he writes, "that pause, as the gale is recollecting itself, and rising upon the ear in a shrill and plaintive tone, like the swell of an Aeolian harp? I do assure you there is nothing in the world so like the voice of a spirit."

We are told, that it was while exposed to a violent storm of wind and rain; attended by frequent flashes of lightning, among the wilds of Glen-Ken, in Galloway, that Burns composed his far-famed song, the Scots who have us "Wallace's blood." Rossini was the child of the storm, its music was ever grateful to his ear. Hence his poetry breathes throughout a tempestuous spirit - when read, as it should be, at the still hour of night. The very rustling of a leaf stirred by the impatient reader, seems to have excited imagination the fitful moanings of the wind, or sighings of the breeze.

But if Milton's winds rock they pipe also, even the monotony of a summer, shower is relieved by the cheerful pattering of minute drops from off the eaves; and if the heavens are for a few moments overcast, the splendor of the sun-

13
mistaken, though his wings, as he tells ^{us}, were already
sprouted, he was as yet content to linger, ^{as he} with child-
like affection, amid the scenes of his native earth.

The tenor of these verses is in keeping with the
poet's early life; he was, as he confesses, a reader
of romances, and occasional frequenter of the play-
house, and not at all averse to spending a cheer-
ful evening now and then, with some kindred spirits
about town. We see nothing here of the Puritan.
The "storied windows" which were afterwards an
abomination in his eyes, admit a welcome, though
sombre, light. The learning of Johnson, and the
wild notes of Shakespeare, are among the last
resources of the mirthful Little Negro.

The student of Milton will ever turn with satis-
faction from contemplating the stern and consis-
tent nonconformist, and bold defender of civil
and religious liberty, engaged, but not involved,
in a tedious and virulent controversy,

With darkness and with dangers compassed ^(round),
his dearest hopes disappointed, and himself shut
out from the cheering light of day, to these

Ceding sunshine is heightened by contrast.

It is amusing to know that Milton was a performer on the bass-viol. He is said even to have been a composer, though nothing remains to prove the assertion. It was his practice, say his biographers, when he had desired to play on some musical instrument, and either sing himself or make his wife sing, who, he said, had a good voice but no ear. This partially for the sister muse is no where more manifest than in these poems; whether in a mirthful or a pensive mood, the 'linked sweetness' of "soft Lydian airs," "the pealing organ," or "the full-voiced quire," dissolve him into ecstasies.

These poems are to be valued, if for no other reason, on account of the assistance they afford us in forming our estimate of the man Milton. They place him in an entirely new, and extremely pleasing, light to the reader who was previously familiar with him as the author of the Paradise Lost alone. If before he venerated, he may now admire and love him. The immortal Milton seems for a space to have put on mortality, & have snatched a moment from the aughtier cares of heaven and hell, to wander for a while among the sons of men. But one

14
fruits of his earlier and brighter years; though of
the earth, yet the flights of one who was contem-
plating to soar 'above the Asian mount,' a heaven-
ward and unattempted course.

I have not undertaken to write a critique,
I have dwelt upon the poet's beauties and not
so much as glanced at his blemishes. This may
be the result of pure selfishness; Poetry is but a
recreation. It ~~striking pictures~~ a pleasing image,
or a fine sentiment, loses none of its charms,
though Burton, or Beaumont and Fletcher, or
Marlowe, or Sir Walter Raleigh, may have written
something very similar, or even, in another connection,
have used the identical word whose aptness we
so much admire. It always appeared to me
that that contemptible kind of criticism which
can deliberately and in cold blood, dissect
the sublimest passage, and take pleasure in
the detection of slight verbal incongruities, was,
when applied to Milton, little better than sacrile-
ge, and that those critics who condescended
to practice it, were to be ranked with the
parish officers who, prompted by a profane and
mercenary spirit, tore from their grave and exposed

16
for sale, what were imagined to be the remains
of Milton.

L'Allegro & Il Penseroso
Jan. 1834

C

(X)